

## Civil War Book Review

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Winter 2009

Article 10

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### More Than a Contest Between Armies: Essays on the Civil War Era

Scott L. Stabler

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#### Recommended Citation

Stabler, Scott L. (2009) "More Than a Contest Between Armies: Essays on the Civil War Era," *Civil War Book Review*: Vol. 11 : Iss. 1 .

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cwbr/vol11/iss1/10>

## Review

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**Marten, James and Foster, A. Kristen, eds..** *More Than a Contest Between Armies: Essays on the Civil War Era*. Kent State University Press, \$35.00 hardcover ISBN 9780873389129

### Scholarly Viewpoints on the Civil War Era

This work forms a compilation of annual lectures made at Marquette University in honor of the university's late historian, Frank L. Klement. Klement, a longtime department member and expert on dissent in the Union during the Civil War, wrote several works on the Copperheads and civil liberties that broke new ground. The twelve lecturers present a who's who in American Civil War history. Ed Ayers, David Blight, Gary Gallagher, Catherine Clinton, and Mark Neely are just some of the key contributors. The lectures, which begin in 1997, also break new ground in Civil War studies. However, they have little in common except they touch on "unique" parts of the Civil War. Each essay has been previously published as a pamphlet by Marquette University Press and several chapters form synopses of books that are already released or are soon to be. The piece comes as part of the series "Civil War in the North," but how these essays fit into the series when at least a quarter of the chapters focus on the Confederacy is a question that one must ask. Another quirk is that the book jacket blurb is given by one of the essayists, Lesley J. Gordon.

The twelve lectures-turned-essays vary in length between 13 and 36 pages. The chapters cover topics from prostitution to the Battle of Fredericksburg to the memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant and almost anything in between. The uniqueness comes in that military, politics, and slavery is left out.

Ed Ayers, now president of the University of Richmond, gives an overview of his Valley of the Shadow project, which compares two communities during the Civil War. Franklin County, Pennsylvania, and Augusta County, Virginia are separated geographically by only a few hundred miles, but philosophically they

could not be more disparate. Ayers' research shows how each county supported its "country" throughout the war. The project, which is now online, uses a plethora of newspaper accounts from the two counties to compare the areas. Ayers concludes, "The Valley Project suggests...that the Civil War might be seen instead as the clash of two modernizing societies" (9).

David Blight, of Yale, uses Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass to highlight Civil War memory. Memory forms the focus of his work *Race and Reunion* (2001). The author's comparison of Douglass and Lincoln demonstrates how the two men interrelated throughout the war and how Douglass carried on the interrelationship to praise and prolong Lincoln's memory after the president's assassination.

Robert Johannsen, now retired University of Illinois professor, believes, "Most of the efforts to probe the meaning of the Civil War, its causes and its impact on the life of the republic, were embodied in the vast pamphlet literature that appeared almost before the guns at Charleston had cooled and extended throughout the entire war" (43). To prove this Johannsen's essay focuses on forty-eight year old New Yorker Henry Tuckerman's pamphlet from the summer of 1861 called *The Rebellion: Its Latent Causes and True Significance*. Tuckerman follows the Republican Party's line on slavery and believes the war a "salvation" to purge the Union of the "peculiar institution." This excitement did not last long.

George Rable's book *Fredericksburg, Fredericksburg* (2001) garnered great praise from critics and scholars. In his Klement lecture the University of Alabama professor gives an overview of how he went about producing the book. He focuses on how northern newspapers perceived the Union defeat at Fredericksburg. This is not a military history, but one of perception.

The recently deceased John Y. Simon's chapter compares the lives of Henry Halleck and U.S. Grant. At Southern Illinois University, Simon served as the editor of the *U.S. Grant Papers* for decades. The thesis of the chapter is that from Halleck's and Grant's antebellum backgrounds the former should have been a successful military commander and the latter a failure in the field. Simon carefully traces the successes of Grant and the failures of Halleck to make his point. He rarely points to the wartime failings of Grant or the achievements of Halleck, but considering the author's background this is understandable.

Catherine Clinton's essay titled "Public Women and the Confederacy" is the most intriguing, but also the longest, unconnected, and least well titled. Clinton covers aspects from the Richmond Bread Riot to sexually transmitted diseases among troops. The parts about how STDs permeated the armies and why women took up prostitution is enlightening. The problems, it takes twelve pages for Clinton to admittedly get to her main point and then concludes the chapter with another story that does not clearly relate to the rest of the essay and concludes nothing.

University of Akron professor Lesley J. Gordon's essay on cowardice in the 16th Connecticut infantry poses the most novel question of the book. She asks if bravery is such a common part of Civil War literature why don't historians write more about cowardice. Gordon shows how even though the 16th performed poorly at the Battle of Antietam the local press clearly liked to put the best spin on how their local troops performed.

Penn State's Mark Neely compares the restriction and violations of civil liberties in the Confederacy under Jefferson Davis with those carried out by Lincoln in the Union during the same period. The focus involves how Davis violated civil liberties to a greater degree than Lincoln, but historians have focused much more on Lincoln's actions. Neely's convincing argument lists many actions taken by Davis that pale in comparison to that of Lincoln and yet Davis receives little in the way of criticism for his actions. The author's reasoning is that Davis's postwar confinement and "lost cause" writings gave Davis a free pass on his violations of civil rights.

William Blair, another Penn State historian, focuses on the lack of treason trials brought by the Union after the war. The essay, though in need of some editing, makes a convincing argument that the Union had neither little choice nor a strong desire to prosecute former Confederate officials. He points out that civil versus military courts and trial locale created dilemmas for the government. These problems and a desire, at least initially, for a quick reunion led to only one trial and execution for crimes during the war--that of Henry Wirz, the commander at Andersonville prison who was convicted of murder—not treason. UCLA professor Joan Waugh notes the importance of the *Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant* and their importance to the memory of the Civil War. Waugh writes, "I am concerned about the battle over the meaning of the American Civil War and Grant's role in the battle as an historian" (222). She deftly tells the story of Grant's struggles to write the memoirs before his death. Waugh also

demonstrates how the work forms a direct contradiction to the "lost cause" portraying the source of the war as slavery and demonstrating why the Union fought and how it won.

J. Matthew Gallman's chapter forms a narrow perspective of how the war impacted noncombatants in the postwar era. Gallman, now at the University of Florida, uses two post-Civil War novels by prominent non-professional writers from Philadelphia to conclude that the war did not seem to have as large an impact as people would suppose. His focus is on the works of Anna Dickinson *What Answer* (1868) and Silas Weir Mitchell's *In War Time* (1884). Dickinson was an abolitionist orator during the war and Dr. Mitchell served as a physician at a military hospital and worked in the local branch of the Sanitary Commission. *In War Time*, Mitchell pairs a southern woman and a northern man to demonstrate reunification while *What Answer* tells the story of love between a white man and black woman to get readers to question race relations in the North. Gallman's chapter ends with a series of "what ifs" while stating how neither author seems transformed much by the war.

University of Virginia history professor Gary Gallagher concludes the book of lectures by tracing the efforts Jubal Early made in the postbellum era to advocate the "lost cause." "As much as anyone, then, Jubal Early constructed the image of the Civil War than many Americans North and South still find congenial" (295). Early does this by giving lectures and lionizing Robert E. Lee and Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson while degrading Union commanders. Gallagher then moves into the evidence to support that the "lost cause" is and has long been vibrant. He notes the numerical superiority of Lee over Grant portrayals in everything from pictures to postage stamps and points to the tainted novel by Winston Groom. Gallagher even quotes noted historian and Lee specialist James Robertson, "In the pantheon of American soldiers, none stands taller than Confederate generals Thomas J. Jackson and R.E. Lee. These two southern generals forged the greatest partnership in command in American history" to make his point (291).

All the above summarizes the book's lectures and demonstrates how good, informative, and divergent the compilation is. Readers looking for a sampling on a lot of little topics from excellent historians will enjoy the read.

*Scott L. Stabler is an assistant professor of history at Grand Valley State University in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He is currently working on a book on O.*

*O. Howard and has a chapter on the aforementioned in the forthcoming book Soldiers West from the University of Oklahoma.*